

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WASAW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY BONN

USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRAGUE 1113/1

GENEVA FOR AMBASSADOR SHERER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CZ

SUBJECT: THE HUSAK CAMPAIGN AGAINST DUBCEK: CURRENT STATUS

1. SUMMARY: NEARLY A MONTH HAS PASSED SINCE GENERAL SECRETARY HUSAK LAUNCHED HIS ATTACK ON DUBCEK APRIL 16. DURING THE MAY 1-9 HOLIDAY PERIOD, THE CAMPAIGN HALTED. NOW THE QUESTIONS ARE WHY WAS IT STARTED WHEN IT WAS, WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT, AND WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN FOR INTERNAL POLITICS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. NO ONE HAS THE ANSWERS, BUT A WHIFF OF THE SPECULATION IN THE AIR DURING THIS PRAGUE SPRING MAY BE OF SOME USE. END SUMMARY.

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2. AS TO WHY AND WHEN THE CAMPAIGN BEGAN, SOME COMBINATION OF

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES SEEMS LIKELY, JUDGING BY THE VERY MEAGRE INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO THE EMBASSY. THE PLACE WHERE THE MEANINGFUL STRUGGLE TOOK PLACE WAS THE PARTY PRESIDIUM, WE BELIEVE, BUT WE SUSPECT THAT IT TOOK AN OUTSIDE EVENT TO TRIGGER HUSAK'S OUTBURST -- SPECIFICALLY THE PUBLICATION IN THE WEST OF DUBCEK'S LETTER. PRESIDIUM-WATCHERS IN PRAGUE HAVE ASSUMED THAT SINCE LAST MAY, WHEN THE PARTY FIRST FACED UP TO THE LIKELIHOOD OF PRESIDENT SVOBODA'S DEMISE, THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER HAS BEEN GOING ON CONSTANTLY. IT DOES NOT SEEM TO US IN THE NATURE OF THE SYSTEM FOR RIVAL LEADERS (REPRESENTING NOT ONLY DIFFERING OUTLOOKS AND CLIENTS BUT DIFFERENT NATIONS, I.E. CZECHS AND SLOVAKS) TO SIT BACK AND ACCEPT A POST-SVOBODA SOLUTION THAT WOULD GIVE BOTH PRESIDENCY AND PARTY LEADERSHIP TO HUSAK. IT DOES SEEM IN THE NATURE OF THE SYSTEM FOR MAJOR POLICY DEBATES DURING THESE PAST TWELVE MONTHS TO ATTACH THEMSELVES TO OPPOSING GROUPS AND OPPOSING CONTENDERS, WITH THE SVOBODA SUCCESSION HANGING OVER EVERYBODY'S HEAD. THE NORMAL DOG-EAT-DOG ATMOSPHERE AT THE HEIGHT OF A COMMUNIST PARTY WAS MADE EVEN MORE FERAL, ONE SUSPECTS, BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT IF SVOBODA DIED ON MONDAY, THEN ALL THE MARBLES GOT PICKED UP ON TUESDAY.

3. THIS TENSE SITUATION BROUGHT GREAT PRESSURE TO BEAR ON HUSAK, FOR HE WAS SLATED TO BE BOTH PRESIDENT AND PARTY LEADER -- SOMETHING HE HAD MANY TIMES CASTIGATED NOVOTNY FOR DOING IN HIS DAY -- AND IF HIS POLICIES WENT WRONG IN THE MEANWHILE, HE WAS VULNERABLE TO BEING PUSHED OFF THE MOUNTAIN. THE ESSENTIAL POLICY QUESTION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, OF COURSE, IS STILL 1968. THE SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH THE ECONOMY'S FUTURE WERE PART OF THE PICTURE, BUT PROBABLY NOT IMMEDIATELY DIVISIVE ISSUES WITHIN THE PRESIDIUM ITSELF. THE QUESTION OF HOW TO DEAL WITH THE COMRADES EXCLUDED FROM THE PARTY AFTER 1968 WAS MUCH CLOSER TO THE HEART OF THINGS, FOR IT TOUCHED ON THE WHOLE GUT ISSUE OF HOW WELL HUSAK HAD BROUGHT THE COUNTRY BEYOND THE CRISIS OF 1968. IT IS COMMON SUPPOSITION THAT HUSAK STOOD FOR MODERATION TOWARDS THE MEN OF 1968; AND THIS MADE HIM VULNERABLE TO ATTACK FROM THE HARD-LINERS. IF THE SOVIET POLITBURO SHOULD EVER LOSE FAITH THAT HUSAK WAS DOING A PROPER JOB OF PULLING THE COUNTRY BACK TOGETHER AFTER 1968, HIS RIVALS WOULD BE ON HIM LIKE HYENAS.

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4. MEANWHILE THE SO-CALLED "SOCIALIST OPPOSITION" WAS ACTIVE PUBLISHING DOCUMENT AFTER DOCUMENT DEFENDING THE MEMORY OF 1968 AND MAKING THE HUSAK REGIME LOOK BAD AND ILL. (ONE OF THE INTERESTING QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE AFFAIR IS HOW STRONG IS THE "SOCIALIST OPPOSITION." OUR HIGHLY TENTATIVE ANSWER IS THAT THE GROUP IS REALLY AN EMIGRE OUTFIT SO FAR AS REAL ORGANIZATION IS CONCERNED, EXCEPT FOR A FEW ACCOMPLICES INSIDE

CZECHOSLOVAKIA; BUT THE STRONG REMAINING SYMPATHY FOR THE DUBCEK EAR MAKES THE "OPPOSITION" POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS, SINCE THE WOODS ARE FULL OF CZECHS AND SLOVAKS WHO MIGHT -- STRESS ON MIGHT -- COOPERATE WITH THE "OPPOSITION" IF A SAFE ENOUGH OCCASION AROSE. THE POLICE PRESUMABLY WOULD TEND TO EXAGGERATE THIS DANGER.) THE DUBCEK LETTER WAS A KIND OF CLIMAX BUT BY NO MEANS NECESSARILY THE END OF THIS SERIES OF DAMAGING DOCUMENTS. THEY HIT HUSAK WHERE IT HURT, FOR THEY MADE HIS REGIME LOOK HORRIBLE -- WHEREAS HE MUST HAVE REALLY THOUGHT OF HIMSELF AS A KIND OF MODERATE, MAKING THE BEST OF AN AWFUL SITUATION -- AND THEY GAVE HIS ENEMIES THE OPPORTUNITY TO CLAIM THAT HE WAS NOT GETTING THE JOB DONE. AS SOVBODA'S HEALTH REMAINED IRREPARABLE AND DECLINING, HUSAK'S VULNERABILITY IN THE FACE OF THE WESTERN PUBLICATIONS INCREASED. SEVERAL FACTORS COULD HAVE INFLUENCED THE TIMING OF HIS OUTBURST ON APRIL 16: THE APPROACHING 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS AND A POSSIBLE BREZHNEV VISIT; THE APPROACHING CSCE FINALE AND THE EUROPEAN CP CONFERENCE; THE END-OF-THE-YEAR CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETINGS WHICH POSSIBLY DEBATED A MODERATE HUSAK PROPOSAL CONCERNING HOW TO DEAL WITH THE MEN OF 1968; A DECLINE IN SOVOBODA'S CONDITION OR MERELY A RECOGNITION THAT THEY WOULD FINALLY HAVE TO REPLACE SVOBODA BEFORE HE DIED; OR MERELY THE IMPACT OF THE DUBCEK LETTER REINFORCED BY SWEDISH PRIMIN PALME'S ATTACK. ONE RECENT RUMOR IS THAT THE IMMEDIATE OCCASION FOR THE APRIL 16 SPEECH WAS THAT HIS RIVALS IN THE PRESIDIUM GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST HIM AND MADE A STRENUEOUS ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THE SUCCESSION PLAN SO THAT HUSAK WOULD BE KICKED UP-STARIS TO THE PRESIDENCY BUT THE PARTY LEADERSHIP WOULD BE ASSUMED BY SOMEONE ELSE (THIS RUMOR SAID EITHER LENART, KEMPNY OR KAPEK). IN ANY EVENT, HUSAK MUST HAVE BEEN UNDER TREMENDOUS PRESSURE, AND HE SHOWED HIS METTLE BY SEIZING THE BULL BY THE HORNS ON APRIL 16, IN AN IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE. HIS ATTACK ON DUBCEK AND THE "OPPOSITION" PROBABLY

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SERVED AN IMMEDIATE PURPOSE OF WARNING ALL CONCERNED THAT IF THE PUBLICATIONS IN THE WEST CONTINUED, THEN "ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES," TRIALS OR IMPRISONMENT WOULD FOLLOW FOR SOME, AND PERHAPS EXILE FOR DUBCEK. BEYOND THIS, IT PUT EVERYONE -- INCLUDING HIS HARD-LINE RIVALS -- ON NOTICE THAT HUSAK WAS STILL IN COMMAND AND COULD BE AS TOUGH ON REBELS AS HE NEEDED TO BE.

5. WHAT NEXT? MOST OBSERVERS IN PRAGUE ASSUME THAT THE PAUSE OVER THE EARLY-MAY HOLIDAYS WAS IN ORDER TO SHOW THE UNITY AND STRENGTH OF THE REGIME AT THIS IMPORTANT CEREMONIAL OCCASION, AND THAT THE ANTI-DUBCEK CAMPAIGN WILL START UP AGAIN STRONGLY IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE FOR THIS ASSUMPTION, EXCEPT THE GREAT FEAR APPARENTLY FELT BY SOME VULNERABLE CZECHS AND SLOVAKS. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, THERE ARE

RUMORS THAT INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE HAS BEEN FOUND
THAT WILL JUSTIFY IMPRISONMENT BY SOME OF THOSE HELPING GET
DOCUMENTS ABROAD, AND SOME DIPLOMATS EXPECT FURTHER SEARCHES
AND POSSIBLY SOME TRIALS THIS SPRING. THERE ARE REPEATED
RUMORS OF ARRESTS, BUT NO REAL EVIDENCE YET THAT ANY HAVE
OCCURRED -- AND THE PRESS HAS DENIED THE RUMORS. AS FOR DUBCEK
HIMSELF, HE MAY BE COMMITTED TO THE PUBLICATION OF FURTHER
STATEMENTS (THERE ARE REPORTS SOME ARE IN EXISTENCE
ALREADY); BUT IF SO, HE IS CERTAINLY IN SERIOUS DANGER OF

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8080

INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 2 PRAGUE 1113/2

ARREST AND POSSIBLY OF EXILE. (THE SOVIET DCM TOLD A WEST-
ERN DIPLOMAT THAT IT WOULD BE VERY EASY TO WALK DUBCEK OVER
ONE OF THE BRIDGES ACROSS THE DANUBE AT BRATISLAVA.) IT IS POS-
SIBLE, PERHAPS, THAT THE LEADERS FEEL THE CAMPAIGN HAS MADE
ITS POINT, AND NOTHING FURTHER IS REQUIRED UNLESS THE "OPPO-

SITION" TAKES FURTHER STEPS ITSELF. EVEN SO, HOWEVER, IT SEEMS TO US THAT IT COULD NOT BE TOO LONG BEFORE FURTHER OUTBURSTS ARE FORTHCOMING, FOR SURELY THE EMIGRES AND THEIR FRIENDS INSIDE THE COUNTRY ARE NOT GOING TO CEASE THEIR EFFORTS NOW, ESPECIALLY WITH THE CSCE FINALE AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY CONFERENCE COMING UP. HOWEVER, THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE OF THE CAMPAIGN IS A SUBJECT UNDER ACTIVE DEBATE HERE, AND FACTS ARE FEW.

6. WHAT IS THE MEANING FOR CZECHOSLOVAK INTERNAL POLITICS?

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WE DO NOT PRESUME TO JUDGE AT THIS POINT WHETHER HUSAK HAS COME OUT AHEAD OR BEHIND. WE ARE CERTAIN THAT HE HAS BEEN UNDER EXTREME PRESSURE, EVEN THOUGH THE MANY WESTERNERS WHO HAVE MET HIM IN RECENT WEEKS SAY HE SEEMS TO BE IN GOOD SHAPE PERSONALLY. (AT THE MAY 9 RECEPTION IN PRAGUE CASTLE, ONE WESTERN AMBASSADOR -- PROTECT -- WAS SPEAKING WITH HUSAK ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF HIGH-LEVEL VISITS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, AND HUSAK SAID HE WAS NOT ABLE AT THE MOMENT TO SPEAK SPECIFICALLY ABOUT HIS LIKELY SCHEDULE. THE AMBASSADOR SAID HE UNDERSTOOD, FOR SPEAKING FRANKLY, HE WAS SURE HUSAK MUST HAVE BEEN THROUGH A LOT RECENTLY. HUSAK REPLIED, "I HAVE BEEN THROUGH SOME VERY HARD TIMES LATELY.") ONE NEW STORY IS THAT A COMPROMISE HAS BEEN ARRIVED AT -- PERHAPS CONNECTED WITH A COMPROMISE UNDER WHICH DUBCEK AND OTHER BIG NAMES WILL BE ATTACKED SEVERLY, BUT MODERATION WILL STILL PREVAIL IN TREATMENT OF LESSER LIGHTS. UNDER THIS COMPROMISE, HUSAK WOULD INDEED BECOME PRESIDENT, WHILE RETAINING HIS GENERAL SECRETARSHIP, BUT AT THE NEXT PARTY CONGRESS (PRESUMABLY NEXT SPRING FOLLOWING THE SOVIET CONGRESS) HE WOULD BE REPLACED AS PARTY BOSS. THIS STORY SOUNDS TOO PAT, AND WE IMAGINE THE STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY IS STILL GOING ON. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, THE YUGOSLAVS, AND SOME OTHERS, BELIEVE HUSAK WILL ASCEND TO THE PRESIDENCY WITHIN THE NEAR FUTURE, ALTHOUGH THIS IS OF COURSE IN THE REALM OF RUMOR. FOR THE MOMENT, HUSAK HAS SEIZED THE INITIATIVE FROM HIS OPPONENTS, AND THE LAVISH TREATMENT OF HIM IN THE PRESS ILLUSTRATES HOW CLEARLY AT THIS MOMENT HE IS NUMBER ONE, AT LEAST AS FAR AS THE PUBLIC IS CONCERNED. BUT WE BELIEVE HUSAK IS STILL UNDER ATTACK FROM TWO DIRECTIONS, FROM THE EMIGRES AND THE "OPPOSITION" WHO HATE HIM AS THE SUCCESSOR TO THE CRUSHING OF DUBCEK, AND FROM HIS RIVALS WHO ARE READY TO USE ANY SIGN THAT HE IS NOT MANAGING THE ERADICATE 1968 AS HE WAS CHARGED TO DO. THE SLUMBERING POLITICS OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA HAVE STIRRED SOMEWHAT, IN ANY EVENT, AND WE RATHER DOUBT THEY WILL DRIFT BACK OFF TO SLEEP WITHOUT SOME FURTHER BED-SHAKING.

7. AS FAR AS SOVIET INTERESTS ARE CONCERNED, IT LOOKS FROM PRAGUE AS IF THEIR OVERRIDING INTEREST IS TO KEEP THINGS CALM AND TO AVOID ANY KIND OF TURMOIL THAT MIGHT STIR UP THE POPULACE AS THEY WERE STIRRED IN 1968. HUSAK'S POLICY OF

GIVING THE PEOPLE A SATISFACTORY STANDARD OF LIVING,
WHILE KEEPING THE IDEOLOGICAL PRESSURE ON, SEEMS TO HAVE
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WORKED PRETTY WELL SO FAR, DESPITE THE BITTERNESS UNDER THE SURFACE. THEREFORE THE SOVIETS, IN CONSIDERING THE SVOBODA SUCCESSION, PROBABLY HAVE AS THEIR FIRST CONSIDERATION TO KEEP THE COUNTRY ON AN EVEN KEEL AND TO AVOID ANY SHOCKS. WHILE THE HARD-LINERS COULD OFFER THE SOVIETS MORE LEGITIMACY FOR THEIR OCCUPATION THAN HUSAK HAS EVER GIVEN THEM, THEY WOULD ALSO RISK STIRRING UP THE QUIESCENT POPULACE. THIS ARGUES FOR MORE MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD POLICIES (AND WE MUST ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THAT "MODERATION" IN POST-1968 CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS NOT A VERY PLEASANT PHENOMENON); AND IF HUSAK MUST BE REPLACED AS PARTY CHIEF, FOR A GRADUAL AND NON-SHOCK SUCCESSION PROCESS.

8. AS FAR AS AMERICAN INTERESTS ARE CONCERNED, WE IMAGINE THE HUSAK-DUBCEK AFFAIR WILL BE OF MOST IMPORTANCE AS IT INFLUENCES THE THINKING OF THE PUBLIC AND OF POLITICAL LEADERS ABOUT EAST-WEST DETENTE. AS FAR AS US SECURITY INTERESTS ARE CONCERNED, WE SEE NO REASON THUS FAR TO THINK THAT THEY WILL BE AFFECTED: ALL OBSERVERS ARE UNANIMOUS THUS FAR IN SAYING THE PRESENT INTERNAL SQUABBLE WILL NOT DISTURB THE LONG-STANDING APATHY OF THE POPULATION. BUT THE WESTERN PRESS, AND SOME POLITICAL CIRCLES PARTICULARLY IN WESTERN EUROPE, STILL SEE DUBCEK AS A VIVID SYMBOL OF THE BRUTALITY OF SOVIET BEHAVIOR IN 1968; A CONTINUED CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIM WOULD HELP KEEP CZECHOSLOVAKIA ALIVE AS AN ISSUE IN EUROPEAN POLITICS.

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